

June 9, 2005

Diane Sugimura  
Director  
Department of Planning and Development  
City of Seattle  
700 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue #2000  
Seattle, Washington 98124

**Re: Waterfront Advisory Team recommendations on the Seattle Central Waterfront**

**1) INTRODUCTION – STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The Waterfront Advisory Team was convened in 2004 by the Department of Planning and Development to advise the city on preferred alternatives for inclusion in the Central Waterfront Concept Plan. For the past nine months, citizen volunteers have sifted through the results of the DPD Waterfront Charrette and other planning efforts. We have identified both the guiding principles and the necessary elements that we think serve to create a successful and vibrant waterfront. We have highlighted the controversial issues and the hard choices that will arise as this new waterfront takes shape. We have expanded the scope of our effort to include issues of governance, for it is clear to us that the successful implementation of this plan over the course of time requires a strong and dedicated steward of the vision. We are pleased to submit the following recommendations. We urge that the Department of Planning and Development incorporate them into the draft Concept Plan and its associated planning tools to guide this immense civic effort that will require the energies of so many of our fellow citizens over the next 50 to 100 years and help make the lively waterfront we all dream of a reality.

**2) WHAT IS A CONCEPT PLAN?**

The Concept Plan is the framework guiding the phased development of the waterfront over a significant period of time. It is a set of overall guidelines and principles that will provide both structure and supporting tools for the governance group that will be the steward and the implementer of the vision. It is not a detailed master plan constrained by specific solutions and objects. It must be flexible enough to take advantage of opportunities that might arise over time and for intelligent changes midstream. It must encourage the testing of all of the diverse design options that fulfill the vision, but provide for a cohesive whole directed by the guiding tools.

Specifically, this should involve determining the sites of major new public places (e.g., a new waterfront park) and setting parameters for the private development that will take place around these public spaces. In this way, design and chance will work harmoniously together.

The Waterfront Advisory Team looks with favor on the guiding principles for the waterfront adopted by the City Council in the Fall of 2004. These include:

- Access and connection.
- Balance and integration.
- Authenticity and identity.
- Destination and movement.
- Diversity and flexibility.
- Economic development.
- Environmental sustainability.

The Concept Plan embodies and advances these principles, which are noted in the following discussion of the details of the plan.

### 3) CORE VISION: THE “STRING OF PEARLS” CONCEPT

After the city’s Waterfront Charette, the DPD synthesized the results into four basic options. Our team recommends the “String of Pearls” option that imagines a necklace overlain along the length of the waterfront. The string of the necklace would be both a N-S pedestrian-oriented shore area and a fish migration corridor. The pearls represent the few thick and lively areas that concentrate many activities and extend E-W into the city. Each pearl is a catalyst, a generator, a focus of energy acting on and transforming the surrounding waterfront areas that string them together. By reinforcing the connection west to the water and east to the neighborhoods, they bring the city to the water and the water into the city, embodying the principle of **access and connection**.

- ***Grand Stairway and Central Waterfront public space.*** This is the key pearl in the necklace. The Team heartily supports the concept of a grand public space that sweeps from Battery Street and Pike Place Market to the waterfront at the aquarium and dramatizes the abrupt descent from First Avenue to the shore. Other guidelines for this central pearl: Take advantage of a lid over the viaduct with grand or winding stairways, stepped terraces, sloping greenswards – whatever can provide a spectacular pedestrian equivalent of the current views we currently experience from the drive along the viaduct. Utilize the large amount of land in city ownership to create a grand public space or park at the shoreline that will provide the logical terminus to the descent. Put in a cove at the water’s edge. Revisit projects conceived before the viaduct removal was considered, like the PS-1 site and the aquarium and find brilliant ways to incorporate them into the over-arching design.
- ***Seattle Art Museum Olympic Sculpture Garden/Myrtle Edwards Park.*** Another exceptional pearl that will create a compelling destination on the northern edge of the waterfront. The Sculpture Garden embodies the city’s longtime commitment to public art and incorporates significant environmental benefit into the public realm. Discussions focused on the need to nurture a broader surrounding arts district like Pioneer Square, so that the Sculpture Garden will not be a lonely outpost and visitors to it will be drawn to related activities. Ideas included the facilitation of new gallery spaces and artist live/work housing—also the possibility of moving one of the historic piers into the vicinity to house such activities. Also discussed at the City Charette was the idea of extending the nearshore into the water by adding a long strip of sandy beach to Myrtle Edwards Park--a move that would surely energize the area adjacent to the Sculpture Garden
- ***Colman Dock / Terminal 48 Area.*** The Team supports the efforts of Washington State Ferries (WSF) to develop an important and bustling destination at Colman Dock. We see this as an opportunity to create a landmark building (for instance the Sydney Opera House) that will function as an icon for the city and highlight one of its most regionally distinctive activities. We approve of the efforts to make the new ferry terminal into a community-gathering place including amenities such as cafes, restaurants, a market, a rooftop park, maritime history education, etc. The recent successful redesign of Grand Central Station along similar lines confirms this welcome trend. We urge WSF to adopt a system/terminal design that will not require a set of concrete holding lanes that will cut off the waterfront from the city. Multiple holding lanes will, for example, impede pedestrian movement to and from the waterfront.

Pioneer Square is our oldest neighborhood. Restoring its historic connection to the waterfront is vital. The pedestrian should experience the Colman terminal as the waterfront edge of the Pioneer Square community, not a separate neighborhood. Existing public facilities such as the Washington Street boat landing should be integrated into this ‘pearl’ in a re-energized manner. We have the opportunity to recapture a major historical moment, the origins of our city and its early experience by building a park, a “Heritage Park,” at the site of Terminal 48. This park could include a quay, historic boats, and a natural beach and could serve as a southern anchor to match the northern Myrtle Edwards/SAM Olympic Park. The shallow bathymetry allows for a large beach at this site. Habitat should be restored in this area, extending and including the edge of Terminal 46 northwards along the newly built Colman Dock. Habitat in the nearshore zone (at least 35 feet wide) between the dock and the water’s edge will create a significant natural element to the new structure.

#### 4) ELEMENTS OF CONTINUITY or THE STRING THAT BINDS THE PEARLS

Linking both the “pearls” and the connecting areas are a series of principles that need to operate over the entire waterfront and help bind it into a cohesive whole with the city. These are the elements of continuity. They overlap with the guiding principles adopted by the Seattle City Council. They are:

- **Destination.** Transform a corridor to pass through into a place to hang out. Give our fellow residents new reasons to go there. Make it the first place someone thinks of for a rendezvous with a friend. Every proposed change must pass this fundamental litmus test. Does it make people want to hang out there? Does it give them opportunities and experiences they can’t find in their own neighborhoods?
- **Diversity, flexibility, balance, integration.** Make sure the waterfront is not all one thing. Use the land in multiple and layered ways. Mix dense pockets of urbanity with lush areas of green. Ensure that each area of the waterfront can be experienced in three or four different modes. Let our existing neighborhoods of the city extend their distinct spirit and character down to the water’s edge and beyond. Incorporate habitat at the edge and extend it into the city.
- **Authenticity and identity.** Anyone who walks on the waterfront should know instantly they are in Seattle and not anywhere else in the world. Our stunning natural setting and the vista of a working waterfront brings this point home. Add to this the maritime and cultural history and tribal heritage. Through commissioning of artwork and other deliberate design steps, this heritage can be integrated in a vital way. Incorporate heritage values into commercial spaces. Ivar’s is an excellent example. Support of local business is a key factor in creating a feeling of authenticity and regional identity. The reliance on national chains is counter to this goal. If everywhere a tourist turns and looks, he or she sees the same stores that exist in their own cities, the attraction is diminished. The lessons of the Pike Place Market are crucial here. Many charette participants proposed extending the excitement and theatricality of the Market down to the water.
- **Public Art.** Seattle is a pioneer in the support of Public Art. A Public Art Trail that extends from the Sculpture Garden to Pioneer Square offers an obvious way to highlight this tradition. Designated spaces along the trail can be livened up by the day-to-day work of artists who engage in activities that will draw in visitors. The construction period is a particularly fruitful time for imaginative programming. We must not just abandon downtown for ten years while machines construct a new reality. Each stage of work offers occasions for site-specific temporary

performances and educational projects that can involve the whole community in the waterfront's transformation.

- **Economic development.** It is not enough for city government to be a mere convener. It must articulate a strong vision and then encourage the elements of that vision through incentives and regulations. It must create opportunities for businesses, urban designers, and developers to partner with communities to bring this vision to pass. It must nurture the creative exception rather than mechanically applying rules, finding new ways to work with developers who are willing to provide community benefits. “Encourage” and “nurture” must be backed with commitment and action. This means providing infrastructure and addressing related needs such as open space, schools, and community centers.

#### 4) TRANSIT AND WATERFRONT ACCESS

Transportation issues have, until now, focused largely on getting through the Waterfront. Our discussions focused on getting to it, and once there, getting around on it. This is a no brainer. If we want a great destination, people will need good access.

- **Transit Hub.** The city and the region must work together to create a multi-modal transit system with convenient hubs. The waterfront is obviously a vital hub. The use of smart cards should provides for easy transitions between all transit modes including ferry, bus, monorail, streetcar, train, and bicycle. This is essential in the intelligent incremental development of a city. We must all act to support the larger collective and design a system that works for the region. Private ferries, a fleet of water taxis, and other modes (rickshaws, jitneys) should play a role on the new Waterfront.
- **Reconnecting All Neighborhoods with the Waterfront and Removing Barriers:** Remove the physical and psychological barriers. Create natural stopping points to inhabit the city as one descends from downtown to the water. It is important to anchor the southern end of the urban waterfront (including the stadium areas and SoDo), rearticulate and celebrate Seattle’s origins, and reconnect the International District with its original location. This would also strengthen the Pioneer Square economy, giving an irregularity to the boundary between upland and waters edge while preserving a strong N-S axis of movement. Belltown must be reconnected to the waterfront in a deliberate and systematic way.
- **Pedestrian Precinct and Cohabitation:** A major component of the plan must be the pedestrian experience. We challenge the standard assumptions regarding joint use by multiple modes. We need to find a way to integrate graceful cohabitation and avoid the impulse to separate uses driven by a history of fear. A continuous pedestrian way must be re-established along the western edge of the piers, a major thoroughway along the waterfront. It can be shared with service access. It must offer excellent connections to the neighborhoods, connections that are not just sidewalks but are activated, interesting, and with significant features incorporated for elderly walkers and the disabled. Maximize the available land with a commitment to joint use by multiple modes of travel with a decrease of emphasis on single occupancy vehicles. Multiple wide lanes, for example, do not create a human-oriented corridor.
- **Access:** Access, in the broad authentic sense, can include:
  - **“Working Waterfront” Viewing.** Create places where one can sit and watch the working waterfront – the ferries coming in, the container ships being unloaded, etc.

- **Water experience.** Ways to touch and experience Elliott Bay will reinforce the connection to the water and the power of the ecosystem. Beaches and lowered walkways, water features and water art should be part of the plan.
- **Parking.** Parking must be removed to the east, behind the western façade of the waterfront. Provision for people with special needs and emergency vehicles is required.
- **Wayfinding.** Current wayfinding (e.g., signs) is woeful. Use all the tools available to help understand the place.

## 5) ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

- **Environmental sustainability.** Build in environmental values from the beginning, not as a mere add-on but as a central element of the design and visioning process. Our waterfront habitat gives Seattle its identity and the commitment to nurture it reflects our community values.
- **Impervious surfaces:** As an extension of the city’s values, it is vital that no-net increase in impervious surfaces occur on the surface of the waterfront to allow for green spaces and public amenities. Decrease it.
- **Habitat.** Thirty percent habitat along the linear extent of the waterfront is a reasonable goal to support the many native species that exist in Elliott Bay, from fish to heron to harbor seals. Beaches (such as proposed at Terminal 48), pocket beaches, coves, rocky areas and softened shorelines will create needed nearshore habitat.
- **Continuous fish migration corridor.** Millions of juvenile salmon emerge from the Duwamish River into Elliott Bay every year. We must provide a quality, if artificial, way for fish to migrate along the water’s edge with shallow refuge areas, kelp beds, and food sources (native vegetation). Creative structures should be envisioned for the water’s edge and along the piers.
- **Stormwater runoff.** Stormwater runs untreated into Elliott Bay. The redevelopment of the waterfront allows for the opportunity to treat this water in rainwater gardens, cascading “creeks” and fountains, bioswales, and other innovative human- oriented ways that connect the city to the bay.
- **Special Waterfront District.** Create a special Central Waterfront District (at the state level) that will allow for some development and environmental regulatory flexibility in a scenario that creates a net environmental benefit and also a human scale exciting dynamic space.
- **Educational features and related artworks.** The dynamic nature of the waterfront, including stormwater runoff, creates an excellent condition for education. Further, artwork that deals with the environment is a particularly rich field. We have some excellent practitioners in the region who bring critical thinking to projects associated with environmental aspects of the waterfront.

## 6) CONTROVERSIES AND TRADE-OFFS

Given the larger community debate and the diverse community representation on the Advisory Team, a number of issues inspired significant debate. Here are the major points at issue and a resume of some of our discussion and collective recommendations:

- **Terminal 46.** Recognizing Port of Seattle’s goal to maintain current customers, the committee considered the short and the long-term use of Terminal 46. In the long term, the site may change to habitat, housing and/or commercial use, but in the near term, the site should remain as a container terminal. The economic goal is twofold: to have no net loss of operating capacity for the Port, but also to ensure that no changes are made now to the infrastructure that will preclude alternative future uses for Terminal 46. Examples include on-ramps, bridges, etc which should be developed to work both for current operations and future potential uses, such as pedestrian access from lower Pioneer Square and the Stadiums to Terminal 46.
- **Habitat versus Urbanism.** The Team agreed that a tradeoff between a strong marine habitat and vital urban environment was not acceptable. The Team strongly urges an approach of respectful and responsible cohabitation. We believe this can be supported and will reflect the stated values of Seattle. The principle of commitment to habitat must be incorporated in all designs in a significant manner. For example, historic restoration and ecological restoration can be done in harmony and to mutual advantage. It shall be developed and implemented starting at the beginning of the project, resulting in quantifiable measures. An example of a quantifiable measure would be 30% habitat restoration along the waterfront.
- **Piers.** The Team supports retaining the authentic and historic aspect of the piers. The pattern of the piers establishes the organizational and spatial structure of the waterfront. As a significant element of the waterfront, past, present and future, the Team understands the need for careful and considered study. But the Team also recommends building enough flexibility into the waterfront plan so that, if at all feasible, a given pier might be relocated elsewhere on the waterfront if it could provide a catalyst for more activity in its new spot—for example, near the Sculpture Garden. The question of altering the diagonal orientation of the piers to perpendicular was debated without clear resolution. Any pier reconstruction must be environmentally sensitive and creative with an environment net benefit.
- **Streetcar Function and Location.** The Team supports the development of a real transit system along the waterfront in which the streetcar should play a significant role. Given the principle of reconnecting the neighborhoods to the waterfront, the Team discussed creating a streetcar network that would connect to other parts of downtown and the rest of the city. All possible locations for the streetcar should be studied.
- **Location of Alaskan Way.** Location of roadway is a key element in making the waterfront work. Factors to be considered in this decision include location of utility, pedestrian and transit needs, environment and habitat needs and big design concepts. Making the decision on the basis of one factor, transportation, is to fail to meet the challenge that a great space demands.

## 7) STEWARD OF THE VISION – IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE

As we stated in our introduction, we feel the need to create a new entity charged with coordinating efforts and implementing the vision—a focal point of strategic intelligence and oversight. Concretely, it is a person (or group of persons) who wakes up every day thinking only of what they can do to make the waterfront our next great civic place. It is unrealistic to lay this charge on civic officials or existing agencies whose multiply-focused work demands that they juggle a hundred other balls. A look at the diverse skills needed over the course of any mega-project will confirm this. These can include:

- Talking to bankers, bureaucrats, property owners, developers, architects, engineers, artists, contractors, community activists, and inspiring their trust.

- Squeezing money out of the federal government and obtaining mortgage commitments from financial institutions.
- Finding meaningful ways for the design community, non-profit groups, and the general public to participate in the process.
- Keeping an eye on the prize and recognizing new opportunities as they arise (for example, a parking lot that the city should acquire).
- Helping maintain public approval and bureaucratic momentum over a fifteen or twenty year period.
- Contracting for arts programming and performance to insure that the waterfront retains its humanity and identity during the construction process.

### **Public Development Authority (PDA)/Public Facility District (PFD).**

The Team discussed the possibility of forming a waterfront public development authority (PDA) or public facility district (PFD) that would sustain itself for 15 to 20 years to shepherd the design and steward the vision for the waterfront. We believe the early implementation of such a structure to superintend long term phased development is essential to obtain the desired rich and vital waterfront. A PFD would be a municipal corporation with taxing authority approved by the voters within the district and would have authority to acquire and sell land and enter into contracts. This type of governing structure would be empowered to deliver infrastructure, incentivize desired activities and facilities, in addition to being able to respond with agility to the opportunities.

This governance structure requires both the full commitment of involved parties and sustained political and financial support. State and local legislation may be needed to form this authority but obtaining this is worth a major effort. Funding sources should include transportation funds, mitigation funds, grants programs, and major players such as the City, State and Port, as well as LID (local improvement district) self-taxing by businesses. With this in mind the form of governance must maximize the access and efficient use of funds. This is where the rubber hits the road.

### **Waterfront Development Partners.**

As a transition to the new development district or authority, we recommend the creation of a Waterfront Partners Group to help push the process forward. We can capitalize on Seattle's proven ability to galvanize people to accomplish a project. This group could include subcommittees to focus on areas such as:

- Overall concept/framework plan
- Resource Development/Legislation
- Governance
- Marketing (selling the waterfront vision to the public)
- Water's Edge/Seawall
- Art/Historic/Maritime/Cultural elements
- Construction/phasing plan

## **8) THE TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENT – A CALL TO ACTION**

One point cannot be stressed enough: the need to shake loose from old perceptions.

The need to continually re-imagine the waterfront—to really engage with it differently—is the most challenging and necessary part of the process before us. To simply replace a concrete runway with a green one, however lushly landscaped, would be to perpetuate the linear grid laid down by a misguided traffic decision of fifty years

ago. We should work to reintroduce a feeling of sinuosity, of movement, of surprise into our new routes and promenades. We should celebrate the irregular boundary between upland and water's edge, breaking up the rigid N-S axis by bringing water into the city and the city down to the water.

It is never a question of merely adding a new element here or preserving an old one there, but of creating in a simple and elegant way a place that will feel both familiar and totally new. If, at the end of the day, the people of this city don't feel that the waterfront has been utterly transformed, we will not have seized to the fullest the opportunity before us.

This is a call to action. We have enjoyed working with you and your staff over the past nine months and we appreciate the major effort your department has made to involve the public in the waterfront planning process. Maybe only once in a hundred years does an opportunity like this come along. Act now and we have a chance to recreate the waterfront as our liveliest and most spectacular civic gathering space.

So here's to a new waterfront with attitude and passion!

Sincerely,

Dick Hayes, Marine Transportation Association of Kitsap  
Elizabeth Conner, Artist  
Karen Daubert, Seattle Parks Foundation  
Kathy Fletcher and Heather Trim, People For Puget Sound  
Flo Lentz, Preservation 4Culture  
Melinda Miller, Port of Seattle  
Paul Niebanck, Community Planner Pioneer Square  
Paul Schell, Former Mayor, City of Seattle  
Greg Smith, Gregory B Smith Real Estate  
Barbara Swift, Swift and Company  
Herald Ugles, ILWU Local 19  
Philip Wohlstetter and David Yeaworth, Allied Arts